

PROMISING PRACTICES IN HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Wisconsin – Resource Centers Offering Access to Services and Comprehensive Information

Issue: Improved information, advice and program enrollment for long-term supports

Summary

Wisconsin is pilot testing Aging and Disability Resource Centers that offer information to the general public about a wide range of community supports available to older persons and persons with disabilities. The Resource Centers also give in-depth advice about long-term support options and provide a single entry point for persons seeking access to the state's home and community based services programs and publicly financed support in nursing facilities, residential settings, and adult family homes. Demand for the Resource Centers' services has been much higher than expected.

Introduction

Obtaining accurate and timely information about long-term support options can be a major challenge for even the savviest individuals. Wisconsin has a long and successful history of expanding community supports for persons with disabilities and for older individuals. Although it

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has been easier to access such programs in Wisconsin than in some other states, individuals still have

difficulty selecting the options best suited to their needs and preferences from among the state's 40 publicly financed long-term support programs. Thus, based on input solicited by the state through focus groups, open forums and advisory committees, the public identified a need for timely information and objective advice about long-term supports from a convenient and easily identifiable source.

This report describes a pilot effort in Wisconsin that created local Resource Centers that offer information and advice about all long-term supports, and enroll persons in the state's publicly funded programs. It discusses how the Resource Centers function, factors that

influenced their establishment, and evidence of the Resource Centers' success to date. This summary is based on written materials produced by the State of Wisconsin, an ongoing evaluation conducted by The Lewin Group, and interviews with state and county staff.

Background

The Aging and Disability Resource Centers are part of Wisconsin's Family Care initiative. Wisconsin's Legislature enacted Family Care in 1999 to ensure better access to long-term care services and improve the quality of life for persons who need long-term support. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has provided the state with both 1915 (b) and 1915 (c) Medicaid waivers to implement the program. Family Care is currently in a pilot phase and serves three populations: persons with physical disabilities, persons with developmental disabilities, and older persons.

Prior to the creation of the Resource Centers, no organization had overall responsibility for coordinating and providing information about all available long-term supports. In fact, information was at times deliberately limited since county governments, which manage most of Wisconsin's publicly funded community

programs, were reluctant to market services aggressively without having adequate funds to meet increased demand. Consequently, information people received depended on who they first happened to contact in the community support system.

Intervention

The Aging and Disability Resource Centers are operational in nine counties, which were selected to represent a range from urban, highly populated counties to sparsely populated rural counties. The Resource Centers can be contacted in-person or through a 24-hour telephone number; staff will also visit an individual's home if requested. If necessary, the Resource Centers are able to respond to urgent situations that might put someone at risk, such as the sudden loss of a caregiver.

The Resource Centers, which are units of county government, perform a variety of functions. The Resource Center staff offer counseling on factors to consider when making long-term care decisions, and provide pre-admission consultations to all individuals entering nursing homes, community-based residential facilities, and adult family homes.

The Resource Centers also provide advice on available publicly funded home and community-based services options and determine eligibility

Resource Centers offer information and benefits counseling, and determine HCBS waiver eligibility.

for Medicaid home and community-based services and two integrated health and long-term care programs available in parts of Wisconsin:

the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) and the Wisconsin Partnership Program.

In addition to long-term care information, the Resource Centers offer information on a full array of preventative and community social services people with disabilities and older people may need. The staff helps people access entitlements such as SSI, Medicare, and Medicaid, and assists them when they

encounter problems with such benefit programs.

The Resource Centers are staffed by social workers and nurses supported by paraprofessional assistants and other clerical and information technology staff. Volunteers are used by some Resource Centers for specific programs such as a friendly visitor service. Resource Centers are required to have a governing board that reflects the ethnic and economic diversity of the county. At least one-quarter of the board's members must be older persons and persons with disabilities.

Implementation

The Resource Centers are part of Family Care, a larger initiative to redesign long-term supports in Wisconsin. The impetus for Family Care came from then-Governor Tommy Thompson, in response to requests from legislators, older people and others to make the system more understandable and to give people more choices about the services and supports available to meet their needs.

The Resource Centers are also able to respond to urgent situations.

The Department of Health and Family Services established the Center for Delivery Systems Development (CDSD), with a full-time staff of 25 individuals in 1996, to lead the system redesign.

Over the next three years the Department worked with various state offices, county governments, providers and their associations, persons who receive services, and advocacy organizations to reach agreement on the principles, goals, and overall vision for the system redesign. This consensus-building effort included focus groups held in a range of settings and geographic locations, and committees formed of selected populations with representation from a variety of stakeholders.

It is difficult to calculate the exact cost of designing and implementing the Resource Centers, because they were created as part of the larger reform initiative of Family Care.

Impact

Wisconsin spent approximately \$10 million supporting the Aging and Disability Resource Centers during the two-year start-up phase: \$4.9 million in FY 1999-2000 and \$5.4 million in FY 2000-2001. These amounts, however, include costs for level of care assessments and waiver eligibility determinations that would have been conducted regardless of whether Resource Centers were established. State staff estimate that approximately one-third of total Resource Center costs can be attributed to these functions. Resource Centers have argued that additional funds are required to adequately fulfill their mission. They will receive \$8.3 million in FY 2003.

Wisconsin hired The Lewin Group to conduct a comprehensive, independent evaluation of Family Care, including the pilot Aging and Disability Resource Centers. During the last six months of 2000, the Resource Centers

answered a total of 34,000 calls, five times higher than anticipated. The high volume of calls has continued, which may suggest the Resource Centers are addressing a need for more information. From October 2001 through September 2002, the Resource Centers made a total of 69,112 information and assistance contacts, which the state defines as an exchange between a person seeking assistance or information and a Resource Center staff person.

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Contact Information

For more information on the Resource Centers, contact Sharon Ryan of Wisconsin's Department of Health and Family Services at 608-267-7378 or ryansa@dhfs.state.wi.us. A web site that describes the Resource Centers is located at <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/LTCare>.

Discussion Questions:

Can Resource Centers effectively provide both comprehensive information to the general public and eligibility determination for people seeking long-term supports?

Can this approach work if it is not part of a larger systems reform effort?

One of a series of reports by Medstat for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in home and community-based services. The entire series is available online at CMS' web site, <http://www.cms.gov>. This report is intended to share information about different approaches to offering home and community-based services. This report is not an endorsement of any practice.